United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/943
31 July 1991

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General welcomes strategic arms reduction agreement signed by United States and Soviet Union.

- Long-term plan to monitor Iraq's weapons of mass destruction expected tomorrow.

- Security Council votes unanimously to renew mandate of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another six months.

- Agreement reached between Provisional Government of Eritrea and United Nations on relief assistance in area.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar has welcomed the signing today of the strategic arms reduction agreement by United States President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, saying the agreement constituted a tangible contribution to a more secure and peaceful world.

His Spokesman said: "The Secretary-General is particularly encouraged that the two sides have begun in earnest the actual elimination of their strategic nuclear weapons arsenals and very much hopes that this process will continue with a view to achieving further reduction."

* * *

A "stringent and intrusive" long-term plan for future monitoring and verification of Iraq's long-range missiles and chemical and biological weapons is expected to be ready tomorrow, 1 August, according to Rolf Ekeus, Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission which is overseeing the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, under Security Council resolution 687 (1991).

The plan, which is intended to ensure future compliance by Iraq, will be presented to the Secretary-General and, subsequently, to the members of the Council for approval.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

Speaking to correspondents at United Nations Headquarters today, Ambassador Ekeus said his inspectors were surprised at the size of the Iraqi chemical weapons programme, reported to be four times greater than acknowledged by Iraq. Iraq had previously declared having from 10,000 to 11,000 chemical weapons, he said, but the team of inspectors had found some "46,000 pieces of field chemical munitions", in considerable amounts located near airport locations in and around Baghdad. He said the long-term monitoring of Iraqi weapons would diverge from the current "search and destroy" missions and enter into a new territory -- production capabilities. The monitoring would be based on data reporting from Iraq, on-site inspections to declared and non-declared sites, and surveillance from above.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is also working on a plan to present to the Secretary-General on the long-term future monitoring of Iraq's nuclear weapons. Agency Director-General Hans Blix told the Council yesterday that a permanent inspection presence in Iraq may be necessary in the future to allow inspections on short notice.

This morning, a United Nations spokesman relayed the comments of the Secretary-General concerning the discrepancies between the Iraqi declarations and the findings of the third inspection team. The Secretary-General observed that it was obvious that there was a "lack of conformity between what Chairman Ekeus says and what the Iraqis say. It is obvious that the Iraqis are apparently concealing chemical weapons, which, of course, is very bad news".

Ambassador Ekeus announced that a special team of inspectors will go to Iraq on Saturday to look for biological weapons, although Iraq has said it has no such weapons or related material important to biological weapons production.

A fourth IAEA inspection team is currently in Iraq and will remain there for another two weeks.

* * *

The Security Council this afternoon extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 1992.

The Council took this action by unanimously adopting resolution 701 (1991), in which it also called on all parties concerned to cooperate fully with the Force in the implementation of its mandate as set forth in resolution 425 (1978). Under its mandate, UNIFIL is responsible for confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and assisting the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority over that area.

After the vote, Council President Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada (Cuba), speaking on behalf of Council members, reaffirmed their commitment to the full sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Lebanon

(more)

within its internationally recognized boundaries. He stressed the need for the implementation of resolution 425 in all its aspects, reiterated full support for the Taif Agreement and commended the Lebanese Government for the recent successful deployment of its army in the Sidon and Tyre regions in the process of extending its authority over all Lebanese territory.

In addition, the Council President commended UNIFIL's troops and troop-contributing countries "for their sacrifices and commitment to the cause of international peace and security under difficult circumstances".

* * *

The Secretary-General of the Provisional Government of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, and Under-Secretary-General James O.C. Jonah, Coordinator of the United Nations response to the critical situation in the Horn of Africa, have reached "complete and satisfactory agreement" on a number of technical issues to facilitate the work of relief organizations and agencies in the area.

The agreement came in the form of a joint communique which was signed by both parties in Asmara on Saturday, 27 July, following meetings there on 25 and 26 July on matters of mutual concern, specifically relating to issues of relief for the people of Eritrea.

During the discussions, the Secretary-General of the Provisional Government clarified his Government's policy on a number of vital issues to the international community. In that connection, he stressed his Government's flexibility in dealing with other Governments and international organizations during the two-year period prior to the referendum. He informed Mr. Jonah that his Government would soon be issuing a formal statement to cover all these matters.

* *** *